library…' (p. 27). What does Foucault mean by this? Does it point to a theory that some libraries are green and others gray? Joking apart, rather than getting lost on such illusory side-tracks, I prefer the English common sense approach as represented by the 'classical source-based' research (p. xvi) undertaken by Erünsal.

Jan Schmidt (Leiden)

Varia

Kuehn, Sara: The Dragon in Medieval East Christian and Islamic Art. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011 (Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts 86). XIII + 298 pages, 92 plates. ISBN 9789004186637. 184,00 €.

A mythological, astrological, literary, and iconographic theme of inextricable complexity, the dragon has lured many heroes, artists, and savants to unravel its meaning. This latest book, by Sara Kuehn, shows little explicit keenness to challenge or refute earlier attempts at interpretation, proposing instead a lucid synthesis through the presentation of an unparalleled wealth of material, yet by doing so, it supersedes a great deal of previous writing. Leaving aside for a moment the classification and interpretation of the dragon as offered by the book, the set of about 400 illustrations alone brings our understanding of the subject to a wholly new level. Monumental dragons from rarely visited and remote sites, barely visible and overlooked ones from what we believed to be well-known buildings, as well as hidden examples from the margins of manuscripts and the handles of metal vessels converge for the first time to strengthen the argument.

If there is one major thesis in the volume, it might be that the student of a theme, as varied as the dragon, must keep the door open for many different and often contradictory explanations, in keeping with the multifarious nature of the subject itself. In her discussion of the dragon, Kuehn convincingly argues that the overriding characteristic of the motif is precisely its ambiguous nature. She shows that an emphasis on its ferocity and the consequent negative aspects would lead to a one-sided interpretation. By contextualising the ancient and mediaeval dragon–drawing, among others, on Calvert Watkins' linguistic reconstruction of the Indo-European dragon-slayer formula–, Kuehn arrives at the recognition that it mostly, if not always, reveals its destructive features in dualist schemes in which the creature often finds itself deterministically positioned so as to provoke its "evil" features to manifest. By revealing them, the dragon is forced further to enact the role of the necessary "other", as it is played off against the hero who represents "our" side. Be it an embodiment of the untamed nature, illness, religious dissent, or politico-military opposition, the dragon of such dualist constructs will be duly defeated by the holder of just power. In addition to being a helpful vehicle for this conceptual othering whereby conflicts can be conveniently visualised and the participants identified, Kuehn demonstrates that the dragon displays inherent "positive" associations as well, hence its ambiguity. Just like the snake sheds its old skin, the dragon, a composite creature assimilating diverse zoomorphic features, can change its shape and

temper; it can equally heal and harm. Kuehn recognises this liminal character of the dragon to be the explanation for its popularity in borderlands, such as the Caucasus, Anatolia, or, to a lesser extent, Central Asia. Regions where clashes between Muslims and Christians, settled people and nomads, were rife, contributed significantly to the development of the dragon imagery. Similar considerations made the dragon a principal talismanic device: protecting and defending those inside a building or a walled enclosure while threatening would-be intruders, the dragon's bi-directionality and ambiguous nature manifests itself powerfully on gateways, facades, and, on a more abstracted level, frontispieces.

Kuehn's book is comprised of five parts and several sub-chapters. After the introduction (Part I) which also includes a summary of past research, the dragon is discussed against four different, though not entirely separable, settings. Part II examines the complex relationship between dragon and nature which permits us to locate the creature in the latter, but also to regard the dragon as its outgrowth. For a more comprehensive view, this part repeatedly touches upon natural history and *ajā'ib* literature, and, while, of course, it cannot encompass every alleged report about dragons or mention every conflation of living and fictitious creatures, sometimes even excluding noteworthy cases, the section nevertheless offers an extensive and varied listing. With Part III, we arrive at the best-known habitat of the dragon, namely, princely and heroic settings which principally consist of the aforementioned dualist schemes, including Iranian and Christian heroic iconographies. While Parts II and III contextualise the dragon in the material sphere, the two final parts shift from nature. Part IV brings the subject to the realm of magic, allowing a closer look on pictorial formulae, such as the knotted and the encircling dragon, and it is also in this chapter that its astrological and talismanic functions are discussed. Finally, in Part V, the dragon sheds its remaining skins and dematerialises into metaphor, becoming a symbol of ambiguity and change. This part is followed by an epilogue which allows a last distant glimpse at the dragon, now from a wider Eurasian perspective.

Probably the greatest achievement of Kuehn, apart from making accessible a vast and often little-known material, is her successful resistance to temptations to generalise and over-theoretise her subject. By making it clear that the boundaries of its huge subject must be demarcated rather arbitrarily, the book avoids the danger of outgrowing its own limits. When speaking about the local, Western-Asian, protohistory of the dragon, Kuehn shifts from the visual to the textual and relegates to the background the role of the dragon iconography in Assyria, Babylonia, and the Zagros. In a geographic sense, the author fences off Eastern Anatolia, Iraq, the Caucasus, Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia as her area of investigation, while the temporal range extends from Late Antiquity, with its Hellenistic heritage, to the Mongol conquest of Western Asia, which marks the takeover of the Chinese-inspired dragon iconography. Critics may argue against such delimitation, but this compromise ensured a densely documented study instead of a birds-eye-view. Even with such restraints, Kuehn's multi-disciplinary approach still requires firm control over a wide spectrum of highly diverse topics. The meticulous descriptions extend to legends, literary narratives, zoological and geographic features, and, of course, artefacts: their conjunction renders the book a difficult read, despite–and partly because of–the

generous explanatory material in the footnotes. But in the end, this book is recommended not so much as a linear text to be read at a stretch, but as a useful tool for looking up certain subjects of inquiry and following their bewildering ramifications. In fact, the painstaking perfection of the notes is an admirable and exemplary achievement in its own right, and this applies especially to the transliteration of Arabic, Turkish, and (Old, Middle, and New) Persian and numerous other Non-Western languages. Apart from a negligible number of misprints (for example, Sourdel-Thomime instead of Sourdel-Thomine in note 19 on page 23, as well as on page 240) and a few questionable omissions from the otherwise concise bibliography (for example, *Dragons in Persian, Mughal, and Turkish Art*, a little book by Norah Titley) the volume offers very little chance for hair-splitting readers to triumph.

The book under review took a decade to be completed, but it will serve for many decades as the standard reference volume for virtually every question the mediaeval dragon iconography raises. Our hope is that Sara Kuehn's next enterprise, a study on angels, bears fruit soon and yields an equally rich harvest.

Iván Szántó (Budapest-Vienna)

Samsami, Behrang: Die Entzauberung des Ostens. Zur Wahrnehmung und Darstellung des Orients bei Hermann Hesse, Armin T. Wegner und Annemarie Schwarzenbach. Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2011 (Moderne-Studien 7). 430 Seiten. ISBN 978-3-89528-799-2. 45,00 €.

Die Druckfassung einer an der Freien Universität Berlin im Fachgebiet Neuere deutsche Literatur entstandenen Dissertation enthält eine Fülle an Informationen: Auf eine weit ausholende „Einführung in die Geschichte der europäischen Orientreise von der Antike bis zum 20. Jahrhundert" (S. 11-72) folgen je 75, 67 und 149 Seiten über die „Wahrnehmung und Darstellung des Orients bei Hermann Hesse, Armin T. Wegner und Annemarie Schwarzenbach. Die Ausführlichkeit der Behandlung steht offensichtlich in keinem Verhältnis zum extrem ungleichen Bekanntheitsgrad der Genannten.

Samsami war es, seinen eigenen Worten zufolge, nicht nur um die Wahrnehmung und Darstellung des Orients in den Reisetexten Hesses, Wegners und Schwarzenbachs zu tun, sondern v. a. auch um die Gründe, die Autoren aus dem deutschsprachigen Raum zwischen 1910 und 1940 zu einem (längeren) Orient- oder Asienaufenthalt bewogen (S. 17). Daher behandelt er die Texte auch „nicht von den Kategorien des Orientalismus, sondern von den Moderne-Paradigmen" (S. 36f.) aus und nicht „als Aneignungsmodell" im Sinne Edward Saids (S. 37).

Für Hermann Hesse, dessen Werk als Musterbeispiel für eine fruchtbare Auseinandersetzung mit der Geisteswelt Asiens gilt, das in den Sechziger- und Siebzigerjahren eine ungeheure weltweite Wirkung entfaltete, war die einzige reale Begegnung mit dem Osten ein „kompletter Fehlschlag" (S. 84). Dabei war gerade Hesse aufgrund der Missionstätigkeit seiner Eltern und Großeltern in Indien und seiner großen Belesenheit von Kindheit an mit der Kultur dieses Weltteils in einem Maße vertraut wie nur wenige seiner Landsleute. Die Reise selbst ging freilich auf einen spontanen, wohl übereilten, Entschluss zurück: Als ihm sein Freund Hans Sturzenegger im Juni 1911 von einem geplanten Besuch bei seinem Bruder in Singapur erzähl-

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